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ABSTRACT

Seven hundred and fifty compositions, randomly selected from National Assessment of Educational Progress essays written by 9-, 13- and 17-year-olds, were analyzed in a study of the skills that go into the writing of a good composition. The essays were first rated as high, medium, or low in quality. A total of 43 different indices reported or hypothesized to have a relationship with composition quality were then identified from a survey of past research and were applied to each of the sample compositions. The relationship of the indices with quality at the different age levels was then tested. Analysis of the results led to the identification of five composing skills related to writing quality: modification within sentences, subordination between sentences, sentence sense, grammar and usage, and vocabulary. The data suggest a rather logical progression in terms of the five skills and provide support for the claim that all five skills should be taught at each grade level with slightly different emphases. (Descriptions of the 43 indices used in the study and suggestions for teaching the five composing skills at different grade levels are included.) (GW)

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FIVE EMPIRICALLY BASED COMPOSITION SKILLS

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What are the skills that go into the writing of a "good composition"? At first glance this question might seem impossible to answer because to identify a composing skill one would have to understand the workings of the mind, in terms of language, and that, as yet, is not possible (Calder, 1970). However, if the skills of composing could be determined they would prove invaluable to teachers. Once skills are known, methods could be developed to measure a child's abilities in those skills and instruction planned to increase or remediate those abilities.

Fortunately there is an indirect method of determining composition skills--indirect in the sense that it is done from a logical and statistical, rather than neurological point of view. That method can be summarized as follows:

Step #1. Identify compositions of high, medium and low quality at various age/grade levels. The reason compositions at different age/grade levels should be selected rather than the same level, is so that the changes in quality across age/grade levels could be studied. This might add some insight into the skills of composing.

Step #2. Identify indices which have a strong statistical relationship with composition quality. Indices are here defined as a quantification of the grammatical, semantic or rhetorical aspects of a composition. For example, the average number of words per sentence would be an index.

Step #3. Logically infer which skills might be measured by the indices.

This three step procedure would result in a set of skills or competencies, the measures of which have a strong statistical relationship with composition quality. Of course, the most precarious step of the three above is the third--inferring which skills are measured by the indices. A statistician would argue

that even though an index has a statistical relationship with quality, it does not indicate that whatever the index measures "causes" good quality. And a linguist would, no doubt, bring up another "causality" problem concerning our third step of the research process. For example, if it was found that the relative frequency of adverbial clauses is a good predictor of composition quality a linguist would ask: "What underlying linguistic process is the cause of the use of adverbial clauses?" Some would claim, it is the increased use of what are called "double-based" transformations. (These are discussed later in this paper.) Others would claim that it is the increased use of all linguistic elements relating to time, manner, location and condition. (Most adverbial clauses are statements of time, manner, location or condition.) As this example illustrates, the same result can be explained in two different ways, or (another way of saying this) two different skills can be postulated to explain the same findings. Once again, the answer to the question, "Which skill causes the results?" is a neurological issue which we can't answer at this time. Consequently, for the purposes of this study we had to establish some criteria for selecting skills to explain results. We settled on the criterion of "teachability." That is, those skills that were most readily translatable into usable classroom procedures were selected in the event that two or more skills could explain the same results.

STEP 1 - THE COMPOSITIONS

Seven hundred and fifty compositions were randomly selected from the National Assessment of Education Progress (1972) sample of compositions written by 9, 13 and 17-year-olds (250 compositions per age level). The compositions were all on the same topic and elicited under the same conditions (eg. time allowed for writing, oral instructions, etc.). The NAEP sample was based on a probability model and included such factors as size of community, income of family, race of

student. Hence we assumed that the 750 composition sample was representative of the writing of 9, 13 and 17-year-olds across the nation. Indeed, considering NAEP's sampling rigor, this was probably the most representative sample ever used as the basis for composition research.

Each essay was rated High, Medium or Low in quality by a team of NAEP raters using a holistic method of scoring. The "holistic" method means that raters independently judge a composition for "overall" quality, not for specific characteristics such as usage, spelling, etc. Judging a composition for specifics has been termed the analytic method of scoring. The holistic method has been shown to produce both reliable and valid results (Fullman and Anderson, 1967; Marzano, 1975).

STEP 2 - THE INDICES

There were actually two phases to Step #2. In phase one of Step #2, past research was surveyed to identify different indices which have been reported or hypothesized to have a relationship with composition quality. In phase two of Step #2, those indices identified from the review of literature were applied to the sample compositions and then their relationship with quality at the different age/grade levels tested using analyses of variance and multiple regression analyses. (Analysis of variance is a statistical technique to determine which indices are related to composition quality; multiple regression is a technique to determine which relationships are the strongest.) Basically only the results of the analyses of variance are reported in this paper. For a detailed discussion of the statistical techniques used readers should consult Marzano and DiStefano (1978).

Phase One - Step #2

The review of literature indicated that many studies have attempted to identify indices which have a relationship with age or grade of the writer; few have dealt

with composition quality. Probably the most well known "age" related study is that conducted by Hunt (1965), who identified 36 indices which had a significant correlation with the grade level of the composition. He found that the length of T-units had the strongest relationship with grade level. (A T-unit is defined as a main clause plus any subordinate clause. Thus a compound sentence will contain as many T-units as there are main clauses, but a complex sentence will contain only one T-unit.) However, T-unit length is a rather gross measure. The other indices are much more specific. Of Hunt's 36 indices 29 were selected for use in this study. They were:

Index 1. Use of AND between T-units
Index 2. Mean clause length
Index 3. Ratio of subordinate to all clauses
Index 4. Mean length of T-units
Index 5. T-units shorter than 9 words
Index 6. Ratio of clauses per T-unit
Index 7. Noun clauses
Index 8. Adjective clauses
Index 9. Adjectives as noun modifiers
Index 10. Genetives as noun modifiers
Index 11. Prepositional phrases as noun modifiers
Index 12. Infinitives as noun modifiers
Index 13. Past participles as noun modifiers
Index 14. Present participles as noun modifiers
Index 15. Factive infinitives
Index 16. Gerunds
Index 17. "Perfect" forms (have + past participle)
Index 18. "Progressive" forms (be + present participle)
Index 19. Passives
Index 20. Use of modals
Index 21. Occurrences of CAN
Index 22. Intransitive verbs
Index 23. Use of BE as main verb
Index 24. Noncomplement adverbials of motion
Index 25. Noncomplement adverbials of time
Index 26. All nonclause noncomplement adverbials
Index 27. Adverbials of manner
Index 28. Predicate adjectives
Index 29. Prepositional phrase complements to adjectives

The Hunt indices excluded from this study were only those we felt were redundant in relationship to the other measures. For example, Hunt included a measure of the number of modifiers attached to a nominal. We felt indices 8-14 would include that same information.

All of the Hunt indices are measures of syntactic elements, within a sentence, that can be described using "traditional" grammar terminology. We felt that using traditional grammar exclusively as a means of describing sentence characteristics might seriously limit the findings. Therefore, we attempted to find descriptions of elements within a sentence not based on traditional grammar. Indices which measured such elements within a sentence were called "nontraditional" measures (for lack of a better name).

One of the better sources for nontraditional within sentence measures was Christensen (1963). Christensen states that modification within a sentence is hierarchial. That is, the simplest sentence is one with no modifiers (eg. no adjectives, adverbs, participles, adjective clauses, etc.) We will call a sentence without any of its modifiers a "base" sentence. For example, all the words in the following sentence belong to the base sentence:

John owns a car.

We will arbitrarily say that any word in a base sentence has a "weight" of 1. But suppose we add a modifier to this base sentence:

John owns a blue car.

Now we have a word which modifies a word in the base sentence (blue modifies car). We give a weight of 2 to any word that modifies a word in the base sentence. But modification can occur at any depth (weight).

John owns a bright blue car.

Bright modifies blue which has a weight of 2. Therefore, we give bright a weight of 3. This concept of depth of modification within a sentence has already been shown to have a strong relationship passage readability (Marzano, 1976). Thus, the following indices were included in the study to determine the relationship depth of modification (within a sentence) has with composition quality:

Index 30. Average depth of modification
Index 31. Weight of deepest modifier

Indices 30 and 31 accounted for nontraditional elements based on the Christensen concept of the "rhetoric" of sentence style. Another way of looking at nontraditional sentence characteristics is through transformational grammar. Transformational grammarians not only describe the elements within a sentence, but they also attempt to explain the origin of those elements. For example, a transformational grammarian would say that the word blue in the sentence:

John owns a blue car.

originated from (or was generated by) the combining of the sentences:

John owns a car.
The car was blue.

The sentence, "The car was blue" was first changed (transformed) to the subordinate clause "which was blue," then transformed to the phrase "of blue" and finally transformed to the word "blue." Then it was inserted or embedded in the sentence "John owns a car." Thus, the sentence that the word blue originated from, went through a series of transformations before it became the word blue. Most transformations that produce subordinate clause, phrases and single words used as modifiers are termed "double based" transformations. This hypothesized transformational process suggested another index to describe within sentence characteristics in a nontraditional way:

Index 32. Average number of double based transformations.

Indices 1-32 seemed to account for most syntactic and rhetorical elements within a sentence that have been hypothesized to have a relationship with composition quality. But what about those elements which go beyond the sentence -- elements related to paragraph development? Once again we turned to Christensen to describe some of those between sentence elements. Christensen states that a well developed paragraph is one in which sentences act as modifiers of one another much like phrases, clauses and single words act as modifiers within a

sentence. Sentences can be given a weight depending on their level of subordination. Take for example the following sentences:

(1) The Smith family went on a picnic.
  (2) Unfortunately it rained that day.
    (3) It came down in buckets.
  (2) They didn't let the rain ruin the picnic.
  (2) They ate in the car.

The most general sentence in the paragraph is the first one. It is, therefore, given a weight of 1. The second sentence tells about what happened when the Smith family went on a picnic. It "modifies" the first sentence and is, therefore, given a weight of 2. The third sentence tells something about the rain--information that is subordinate to or modifies the fact that it rained. Thus, the third sentence is given a weight of 3. The fourth and fifth sentences, once again, relate something about the picnic (level 1) and not about the rain (level 2), so both receive a weight of 2 because they are subordinate to a level 1 sentence.

This concept of weighting sentences allowed us to develop a measure with which we could test the hypothesis that the good writer is one who uses sentences of increasingly deeper levels of subordination. That measure was:

Index 33. Average depth of between sentence subordination.

The 33 indices mentioned thusfar were taken from past research and theory. Composition textbooks were also reviewed, using the logic that "if composition textbooks have exercises in a given skill, then it can be assumed that the skill is one hypothesized to have a relationship with composition quality." The following areas were found to be commonly mentioned in the composition textbooks reviewed: spelling, capitalization, punctuation, agreement of subject/verb and pronoun/antecedent, tense usage, fragments and runons. Thus the following indices were defined:

Index 34. Average number of spelling errors
Index 35. Average number of capitalization errors
Index 36. Average number of punctuation errors
Index 37. Average number of fragments
Index 38. Average number of agreement errors
Index 39. Average number of runon sentences
Index 40. Average number of tense errors.

It is interesting to note that indices 34-40 were all found in composition textbooks and all dealt with "errors" in composing.

Vocabulary was also an area commonly mentioned in composition textbooks. In this study vocabulary was measured in three ways. The first method was to calculate the average number of letters per word in a composition. The reader might balk at this index as a measure of vocabulary; however, the review of literature indicated that word length is a highly significant predictor of word difficulty (Marzano and DiStefano, 1975) and average word length correlates highly with composition quality. The second method of measuring vocabulary was to quantify the number of word choice errors in a composition. To define word choice errors we used the criteria established by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (1972). The third index of vocabulary was the ratio of "different" words to "total" words. For example, consider the following sentence:

That car is the car I will buy when I get my next car.

There are 14 total words in the sentence but only 11 are different (car is used three times; I is used twice). Therefore, the ratio for this sentence is 11/14. Thus, the following indices were used to measure vocabulary:

Index 41. Average number of letters per word
Index 42. Average numberof word choice errors
Index 43. Ratio of different to total words.

In summary then, there were 43 measures or indices identified from past research as having a strong relationship with composition quality. Indices 1-29 measured within sentence elements that could be described using traditional grammar. Indices 30-32 quantified elements within a sentence that had to be described using non-traditional terminology (Christensen rhetoric of the sentence and transformational

grammar). Index 33 dealt with modification or subordination between sentences using the Christensen rhetoric of the paragraph. Indices 34-40 quantified composing errors. Indices 41-43 dealt with vocabulary.

Phase Two -- Step #2

The 43 indices identified in the review of literature were then used in phase two of Step #2. That is, each of the 750 compositions (250 for each age/grade level - 9, 13 and 17) were analyzed using the 43 indices. Needless to say, this aspect of the research process was quite time consuming. On the average, it took 30 minutes to analyze each composition using the 43 indices.

Each of the 43 indices was then tested (using separate analyses of variance) to determine its relationship with high, medium and low quality. The results of all analyses (multiple regression and ANOVA) at all three age/grade levels are too lengthy to discuss here. (As was mentioned previously, for a detailed discussion of the statistical techniques and results see Marzano and DiStefano, 1978). However, Table 1 reports those indices in which high, medium and low composition were significantly different.

Table 1

x indicates significance .05

Index	Name	Age 9	13	17
1	AND between T-units	X	X	X
2	clause length		X	X
3	sub/all clauses	X	X	
4	T-unit length	X	X	
5	short T-units			
6	clauses/T-unit	X	X	
7	noun clauses	X	X	
8	adj. clauses	X	X	
9	adjectives			X
10	genetives		X	X
11	prep phrase as mod		X	
12	inf as mod		X	X
13	past part as mod		X	X
14	pres part as mod			X
15	infinitives		X	
16	gerunds			X
17	perfect forms	X		
18	progressives			
19	passives	X		
20	modals	X		
21	CAN	X		
22	intrans verb			
23	BE as MV			
24	adv of motion		X	X
25	adv of time		X	X
26	noncl noncomp adv		X	X
27	adv of manner		X	X
28	pred adj		X	X
29	prep phrase comp		X	
30	avg wgt of med		X	X
31	wgt of deepest mod		X	X
32	double based trans	X	X	X
33	betwn sent sub	X	X	X
34	spelling	X	X	X
35	capitalization			
36	punctuation			
37	fragments			X
38	agreement			X
39	runons	X	X	X
40	tense errors			X
41	letters/word	X	X	
42	word choice errors		X	X
43	diff/total words	X	X	X

At first glance Table 1 might appear to be uninterpretable. But upon close inspection one finds some fairly strong patterns. Let us first consider the traditional within sentence measures (Indices 1-29). At the 9-year-old level the use of subordinate clauses seems to be a major factor determining quality. The better compositions at age 9 invariably had more subordinate clauses (see indices 3,6,7 and 8). However, at the 17-year-old level this was not a factor in quality. (The good vs. poor compositions for 17-year-olds had equal amounts of subordinate clauses.) Quality for 17-year-olds' compositions was a function of the use of modifiers that were generally smaller than a phrase (Indices 9, 10, 13, 14, 24, 25, 26, 27 were significant predictors of quality at age 17 and these indices all measure single words used as modifiers--eg. adjectives, genetives, past and present participles.) For 13-year-olds quality seemed to be a function of the use of subordinate clauses and phrases but not single word modifiers (see Indices 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, 15, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28). Double based transformation (Index 32) was related to quality at all ages. T-unit length was a significant predictor of quality at ages 9 and 13 but not 17. The Christensen within sentence depth of modification indices (30 and 31) were related to quality at ages 13 and 17 but not 9. The error measures of spelling (34) and runons (39) were a factor in quality at all ages, but fragments (37), agreement errors (38) and tense errors (40) were related to quality for 17-year-olds only. Word choice errors (42) was a significant factor for 13 and 17-year-olds; word length (41) for 9 and 13-year-olds and "different" words for 9, 13 and 17-year-olds (43). The measures of verb complexity (Indices 17-23) were related to quality at the 9-year-old level but capitalization and punctuation (35 and 36) were not related to quality at any level. Although Table 1 does not show it, between sentence subordination (Index 33) had the strongest relationship to quality at all age levels.

In summary, the results of Step #2 in the research process indicated that

quality for 9-year-old writers is a function of: (1) use of subordinate clauses, (2) infrequency of spelling and runon errors, (3) the development of paragraphs by using sentences that are subordinate to other sentences in the paragraph, (4) the complexity of verbs and (5) the use of different words to express repeated concepts. Quality in composing for 13-year-olds is affected by the same factors that affect quality for 9-year-olds (except complexity of verbs). But composition quality for 13-year-olds is also a function of the use of phrases and depth of modification. Composing quality at age 17 is a more complex issue (and logically so). It is affected by: (1) the use of phrases as modifiers and single words used as modifiers (but not subordinate clauses), (2) the depth of modification of single words and phrases, (3) the infrequency of all types of errors (except for capitalization and punctuation), (4) the development of paragraphs and (5) the type of words used.

STEP #3

The results of Step #2 in the study lent themselves nicely to interpretation in terms of skills. As students grow older, there appears to be a progression from the use of subordinate clauses to phrases to single word modifiers as factors influencing composition quality. This is not to say that 9-year-olds use more subordinate clauses than 13 and 17-year-olds. In fact, the contrary is true. Seventeen-year-olds used more subordinate clauses, phrases and single word modifiers that 13-year-olds who used more than 9-year-olds. It appears, then, that the use of subordinate clauses is a skill that develops somewhere at the elementary level. Those elementary school children who have acquired the use of subordinate clauses generally write better compositions than those who haven't mastered their use. But 9-year-olds (even good writers at that age) are not very adept at using phrases and single word modifiers. The use of phrases seems to develop somewhere around the 13-year-old level. Those 13-year-olds

who have acquired this ability write better compositions. The use of single word modifiers doesn't fully develop until somewhere around the 17-year-old level. But by that age even poor writers use subordinate clauses and phrases well (as is evidenced by the fact that good vs. medium vs. low quality writers at the 17-year-old level used about the same amount of phrases and subordinate clauses).

So then, can we say that use of subordinate clauses, phrases and single word modifiers are skills of composing which develop at the elementary, junior high and senior high levels respectively? Or are all three really extensions of the same skill? As was mentioned previously, a transformational grammarian would call Index 32 (double based transformations) a measure of the extent to which clauses, phrases and single word modifiers are components of the same skill. That is, a transformational grammarian would explain the production of subordinate clauses, phrases and single word modifiers as components of the same process - the process of reducing and embedding sentences. This means that, following transformational theory, the skill of producing a single word modifier (eg. an adjective) would involve a three step process. The student would start with a sentence (called a kernel) and transform it to a subordinate clause (transformation #1); then transform that subordinate clause to a phrase (transformation #2); then transform that phrase to an adjective (transformation #3). The skill of producing a phrase would involve only two steps (transformations 1 and 2), and the skill of using a subordinate clause would involve only one step (transformation #1). This seems to fit well with our results (Index 32 had a significant relationship with quality at all age levels) and has some intuitive appeal. (Use of single word modifiers involves many transformations; "therefore," it is a more complex operation than use of phrases and clauses.) However, this explanation of the use of clausal, phrasal and single word modifiers has not stood up to current empirical tests (Marzano, 1978) and has met with severe

criticism from the linguistic world (Hermanns, 1972). In light of these criticisms we found it logical to conclude that three aspects of composition quality are: (1) use of subordinate clauses, (2) use of phrases and (3) use of single word modifiers. We did not feel it would be valid, at this time, to identify the precise psycholinguistic process involved in the production of these syntactic elements. To reject one psycholinguistic explanation (the transformational process) does not mean that some other common explanation will some day be validated. Therefore, we found it safe to label all three elements as modifiers and to identify as a skill of composing:

Skill #1. Modification within sentences. This skill has three forms: (1) subordinate clauses, (2) phrases and (3) single word modifiers, which seem to develop at different age levels.

The data also support a second skill of composing, which we have elected to call:

Skill #2. Subordination between sentences.

It appears that writers deal with modification or subordination in two basic forms. One form is within a sentence (Skill #1). The student embellishes upon the basic idea in a sentence by adding modifying ideas in the form of subordinate clauses, phrases and single words. This same process of embellishing via modification is done between sentences. Writers add sentences within a paragraph which modify the thesis sentence. The more sophisticated the writer becomes, the more he/she is able to add sentences which not only modify the thesis sentence but modify sentences which are, themselves, modifiers of the thesis sentence (as the third sentence in our sample paragraph, "It came down in buckets," modifies the second sentence, "Unfortunately it rained that day," which modifies the thesis sentence).

A third skill of composition might be called:

Skill #3. Sentence sense.

The identification of this skill is a consequence of the fact that use of runons is related to quality at all ages but the use of fragments does not become an issue until high school. This is not to say that younger students don't use fragments. They do, but it's not until the later years that student compositions become long enough that the frequency of use of fragments starts to affect composition quality.

A fourth skill of composition appears to be:

Skill #4. Usage.

At the elementary level this primarily involves spelling (which carries through to the later years). As students become older, subject/verb, pronoun/antecedent and tense agreement become issues. Once again, this is not to say that elementary students do not make errors in tense or agreement. At the elementary level compositions contain sentences whose structures are simple enough that subject/verb, pronoun/antecedent problems rarely arise. For example, a common cause of agreement problems between subject and verb occurs when there are intervening phrases between the subject and the verb. Consider the following agreement error:

The pep-talks given to the team by the captain was very useful.

The subject (pep-talks) which is plural and the verb (was) which is singular should agree but the intervening phrase, "given to the team by the coach," has probably made the writer confused as to the subject of the sentence. Since elementary school students write few intervening phrases, there is less occasion for subject/verb agreement errors to arise.

The final skill we identified was:

Skill #5. Vocabulary.

Roughly translated this means the use of different words to express redundant concepts in a composition. That is, rather than use the same word to express

a concept, which is repeated in a composition, the good writer will choose different words to express that concept. This skill carries through at all age/grade levels and there is a gradual trend to use a higher frequency of "different" words as students grow older.

APPLYING THE FIVE SKILLS TO THE CLASSROOM

What do these five skills mean to the teacher of composition at the elementary, junior high and high school levels? First, we must again remind the reader that our main goal in this study was to empirically identify usable or "teachable" composition skills. Surely, the results in Table 1 could be interpreted in a more sophisticated psycholinguistic sense and other skills postulated to explain the results. Indeed we have done this in our 1978 paper previously alluded to (Marzano and DiStefano, 1978). However, those other skills do not lend themselves to classroom instruction as well as the skills reported in this paper.

Our data suggest a rather logical progression in terms of the five skills. Firstly all five skills should be taught at each grade level but with slightly different emphases within each skill.

Skill #1. Modification Within Sentences

In grades 3-6 (approximately) emphasis should be placed on the modification of an idea within a sentence via the use of subordinate clauses. In grades 7-9 within sentence modification using subordinate clauses and phrases should be taught, and in grades 10-12 emphasis should be placed primarily on generating single word modifiers. But how can this concept of within sentence modification be taught? Strong (1976) and others (Mellon,1969) feel that it can best be taught by sentence-combining. This is a very structured type of practice in reducing sentences to subordinate clauses or phrases or single word modifiers and then "embedding" those reduced structures in another sentence. For example,

using the sentence combining technique a teacher would give students the following simple sentences:

a) The contest entries will be judged by four art professors.
b) The professors are from the university.

Students would then be asked to keep sentence a the same but to change sentence b and place it in (embed it in) sentence a so that there is only one sentence expressing both ideas. At the elementary school level students would be taught to change the sentence to be embedded into a subordinate clause:

> The contest entries will be judged by four art professors who are from the university.

At the junior high level students would be taught to change the embedded sentence to a phrase:

> The contest entries will be judged by four art professors from the university.

At the high school level emphasis would be placed on reducing sentences to single word modifiers:

> The contest entries will be judged by four university art professors.

In our article entitled "Basic Skills in Composition: A New Approach" (see DiStefano and Marzano, 1978) we have suggested that while sentence-combining practice is good, it requires quite a bit of preparation on the part of the teacher (generating sentences) and/or a set of expensive materials. We feel the benefits of sentence-combining can best be gained by what we call the sentence-combining "rewrite" technique. After a student has written a composition, the teacher can go over the composition with the student and identify sentences that could be "rewritten" as subordinate clauses, phrases and single word modifiers. We also feel strongly about an alternative method, to sentence-combining, for increasing modification within sentences. That method we have termed the "expansion" method.

In the expansion method a student is given a simple sentence and asked to expand on that sentence by adding clauses, phrases or single word modifiers. For example, the following type of exercise could be constructed for students:

Base Sentence: Bill fed the dog.

Add:
1) a clause telling when Bill fed the dog
2) a single word modifier telling something about the dog
3) a phrase telling why Bill fed the dog.

The expansion method can also be used via the rewrite technique. A teacher can mark a student's composition identifying where specific types of clauses, phrases and single word modifiers could be added. The student would then rewrite the composition adding those elements suggested by the teacher. The expansion method would also provide a platform from which traditional grammar terminology (eg. "subordinate clauses," "infinitive phrases," etc.) could be taught in a highly meaningful way to students; meaningful in the sense, that the grammar terms would be necessary for a teacher to communicate to students which structures should be added. This might provide "relevance," to students, for grammar terminology. A relevance that has been lacking in the past.

Skill #2. Subordination Between Sentences

As was mentioned previously, sentences can be given a "weight" depending on their level of subordination. In elementary school compositions, weights are generally no higher than 2 or 3. For good writers at the high school level, however, it is not uncommon to find weights as high as 5 and 6. Once again using the rewrite technique students can be taught this skill without the use of new terminology. For example, the teacher can look over a student's composition and assign weights. Let's say a student wrote the following composition and the teacher gave those sentences the weights in parentheses:

a. I went to the store. (1)
b. There, I bought a candy bar. (2)
c. I also bought some bananas. (2)
d. I bought peanuts too. (2)

This is a very simple and unsophisticated paragraph as is evidenced by the pattern of low weights, 1, 2, 2, 2. Seeing this pattern of low weights, the teacher could tell the student to rewrite the paragraph and add:

1) a sentence after b telling something about the candy bar.
2) a sentence after c telling something about bananas.

The student's rewritten composition might read something like the following:

I went to the store.
There I bought a candy bar.
It was filled with chocolate and nuts.
I also bought some bananas.
However, I'm really not very fond of bananas.
I bought peanuts too.

Thus the student has increased the sophistication of his paragraph by adding sentences of increasingly deeper modification. Since this technique requires no special terminology, it can be used at any grade level.

Skills 3, 4 and 5

Skills 3 and 4 (sentence-sense and usage) can be taught using fairly traditional methods. Sentence-sense is an area that apparently needs re-emphasis at all grade levels. And most standard grammar and composition textbooks have exercises devoted to sensitizing students to the use of fragments and runons. Exercises in agreement errors can also be found in virtually all grammar textbooks. Specifics as to subject/verb, pronoun, antecedent and tense agreement shoudl not be overemphasized at the elementary school level but should receive considerable attention from junior high on. Spelling should be treated, in depth, at all grade levels.

Vocabulary, we feel (Skill #5) could best be fostered by the rewrite technique similar to that used for skills 1 and 2. Words in a student's composition that have been "overused" might be identified and the student asked to rewrite the composition replacing those identified words with different words.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summary, then, the results of our study lent themselves rather nicely to the identification of five highly "teachable" composing skills. They are teachable in the sense that 3 out of 5 skills (1, 2 and 5) can be taught and fostered by having students rewrite their compositions with specific instructions from the teacher as to: (1) sentences that should be combined or expanded to foster modification within sentences; (2) sentences that should be added to foster more depth of modification between sentences, and (3) words that should be changed to foster more variety of vocabulary. The other two skills (3 and 4) can be taught and reinforced using exercises from currently existing grammar and composition texts. Thus all five skills could be immediately incorporated into most composition programs without the purchase of additional materials. For those teachers who are diagnostically oriented, we have developed a nationally normal diagnostic system with which specific skill strengths and weaknesses can be identified for each student and activities prescribed. Interested readers should consult Marzano and DiStefano (Di Comp, 1977). In any event, we feel the identification of these five skills should "focus" composition instruction and, therefore, aid it at all levels.

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